

## layers (like onions) by Potrix

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**Summary:**

Sadie had blinked at him, stunned, and then scrambled to sign the contract. Flexible hours, two free meals per shift, decent insurance, and paying slightly above minimum wage? It had been everything a struggling student like her could hope for, and then some.

Now, faced with the prospect of having to tell her boss that she's screwing up on her very first shift, Sadie wishes she was anywhere but here, though. Still, she steels herself, takes a deep breath, and knocks on Mr Hargrove's office door.

A moment later, a gruff voice calls back, "Come in."

[Billy and Steve, older but none the wiser, through a stranger's eyes.]

## layers (like onions)

### Author's Note:

I had this idea today, and it just wouldn't leave me alone, so I wrote it. Not beta read, so please excuse any mistakes. Also, yes, the title is obviously a Shrek reference.

Sadie is having the absolutely worst first day at work, and the lunch rush isn't even over yet.

It had started with the fancy coffee maker spitting steam at her when she'd tried to show her new co-worker that she understood how to use it, burning the back of her hand and her wrist. Then the trash bag she'd been carrying to the dumpster out back had ripped, spilling all over her feet and the kitchen floor, so she'd spent fifteen minutes cleaning up while apologising profusely.

And to top it all off, her first table hadn't tipped at all, even though Sadie had pulled out all the stops, been all friendly smiles and polite small-talk despite the total shitshow her morning had turned out to be.

Things don't look much better with her current table, either.

So far, they've yelled across the restaurant for her when she hadn't been fast enough with their drinks, demanded three additional baskets of the complimentary bread, one of them won't stop making gross comments whenever she has to walk by, and by the look on one of the men's faces right now, they aren't happy with their food, either.

Forced smile firmly in place, Sadie approaches their table, ignoring the urge to roll her eyes when one of them clicks his fingers at her.

Before she can so much as ask what seems to be the problem, the scowling man snaps, "This burger has onions on it."

"Yes, sir," Sadie tries, summoning up patience only acquired through

years of waitressing, “all our burgers come with tomatoes, pickles, and onions—”

“Well, I don’t like onions,” the man says, slowly, glaring up at Sadie. “I didn’t want any onions.”

“Of course, sir, I’m so sorry,” Sadie apologises, instead of demanding, like she really wants to, “Then why the hell did you order a dish with onions in it?”

She pulls her notepad out of her pocket, quickly scribbling down an order for a replacement burger, and underlining the *no onions* three times. “I’ll put a new order in for you right away, sir. Would you like me to add a side dish as well? Free of charge, of course, as an—”

“No, no,” the man cuts in, and throws the burger he’d been holding down hard enough that it slips off his plate, and falls apart on the table. Which only appears to make him angrier. “Look at this mess. I want you to clean this up, and then I want to speak with whoever’s in charge here.”

The two other men nod, clearly not only used to their friend’s behaviour, but actively encouraging it. “Get to it, sweetheart,” one of them demands, making Sadie bite the inside of her cheek, “before all of our food goes cold.”

“Certainly, sirs,” Sadie scrapes the ruined burger off the table, waving over one of the busboys, “I’ll take care of this right away.”

Despite her words, after putting in the order for the new, onion-free burger, Sadie leans against the wall in the kitchen for a moment, breathing out heavily as she tries to compose herself. The line cook shoots her a sympathetic look, and Sadie smiles back shakily, grateful for the silent support.

Her boss’ office is one floor up, and Sadie isn’t too proud to sneak behind the bar, and make her way to the stairwell where she hopefully won’t be spotted by anyone from her table.

It’s quiet, once the door closes behind her, the voices of the guests and the sounds of the restaurant muffled, and Sadie swallows hard as

she starts up the stairs. She's seen her boss a grand total of thirty seconds so far, when he'd breezed in earlier, with a small child in each arm, a phone clutched between his shoulder and ear, and a frown on his face, while her co-workers had been showing her the ropes.

Mr Hargrove had been supposed to be the one to interview her, last week, but instead, Sadie'd been greeted by his business partner. He'd shaken her hand, smiling brightly, and introduced himself as, "Steven Harrington, but please, call me Steve, everyone does," before explaining, all sheepishly, that Mr Hargrove was usually the one talking to the new hires, but that he'd unfortunately been called away on short notice.

He'd offered Sadie coffee, and had gotten her a glass of water instead when she'd declined, before dropping down in the swivel chair on the opposite side of the desk, picking up Sadie's resume with a hum. "I'll be honest, here, I don't usually deal with this side of the business," he'd said, chuckling a little to himself, "but if Billy's invited you here for an in-person interview, chances are high he's already decided to hire you. He can be picky."

It had been said with a sigh, half annoyed and half fond. "So," Steve had put the resume down again, and shrugged at Sadie, "if you're still interested, and if the hours and pay you've talked about over the phone work for you, I don't see a reason why you can't start next Friday."

Sadie had blinked at him, stunned, and then scrambled to sign the contract. Flexible hours, two free meals per shift, decent insurance, and paying slightly above minimum wage? It had been everything a struggling student like her could hope for, and then some.

Now, faced with the prospect of having to tell her boss that she's screwing up on her very first shift, Sadie wishes she was anywhere but here. Still, she steels herself, takes a deep breath, and knocks on Mr Hargrove's office door.

A moment later, a gruff voice calls back, "Come in."

Mr Hargrove is sat behind his desk, one eyebrow raised, and Sadie

hesitates, standing awkwardly on the threshold. The kids—definitely Mr Hargrove’s, going by their wild, curly hair—are playing on a blanket in front of the small couch, where Steve is sitting with a laptop open on his lap.

He smiles and waves at Sadie, which gives her the confidence to clear her throat, and say, “One of the guests would like to talk to you, Mr Hargrove.”

When Mr Hargrove only raises his eyebrow further, she adds, “He ordered a burger with onions, but says he doesn’t like onions. I offered him a new burger with a free side dish, but, well.”

“Fuck’s sake,” Mr Hargrove mutters, which earns him a scolding look from Steve, followed by a stern, “Language, Billy.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Mr Hargrove says, with a small roll of his eyes. He gets up from behind his desk, gesturing for Sadie to lead the way. “C’mon, let’s go deal with this shit.”

He’s obviously not happy about the interruption, but Sadie’s glad to notice that his irritation seems to be aimed at the picky guest, not her. The cursing also helps, strangely enough, has her bite back a giggle as they walk back down to the main floor.

Mr Hargrove looks intimidating, at first glance, what with all the tattoos, the denim, and the heavy jewellery. Like those bikers always parked in front of the shady bar a block down from her shitty, shoebox-sized apartment. Only, like, prettier.

Sadie ducks her head a little, blushing faintly. Mr Hargrove has to be in his thirties, is almost old enough to be her dad, and Sadie isn’t even interested in men like that, but she does have eyes. The blond curls, piled into a messy bun on top of his head, the dimples, the striking, bright blue eyes; Mr Hargrove is definitely good-looking.

Frannie would have a field day if she knew Sadie was getting flustered by her old, cranky new boss. Sadie silently vows to never tell her girlfriend a single word about it, ever.

“It’s the booth in the back,” she says, once they reach the main room

of the restaurant again, pointing in the general direction, “by the big window—”

Mr Hargrove freezes mid-step when he spots the three men, but only for a second. Then he sneers, teeth bared, “Hell no.”

He stalks over to the booth, fast enough that Sadie has to hurry in order to keep up, and slaps the fork right out of one of the men’s hand with a snarled, “Get the fuck out of my restaurant.”

The men at the table—and a few people within earshot—fall silent in shock, all gaping at Mr Hargrove. Then, the now forkless man pushes to his feet, and right into Mr Hargrove’s space. “William—”

Mr Hargrove doesn’t back down, though, and he has several inches on the other man. “Get out. Right now, all of you. You’re not welcome here.”

The other man’s face twists in outrage. “How dare you speak to me like this? You can’t throw us out, we’re paying customers!”

“Oh, trust me,” Mr Hargrove’s smile is, Sadie thinks, pretty damn terrifying, “I can. And I will.”

“On what grounds?” the other man scoffs, and crosses his arms over his chest.

“Well, let’s see. For harassing my staff,” Mr Hargrove begins, and holds up his hand, counting on his fingers, “or, maybe, the years of emotional abuse? For regularly beating the shit outta me for close to a decade? Or for just generally being a terrible fucking human being, and an even worse father?”

The restaurant is so quiet, after that, Sadie’s almost afraid to breathe.

“Take your pick,” Mr Hargrove finishes, and takes a step back with a sweeping motion towards the door. “But get the fuck out, Neil. Or we will call the police.”

“Honestly, I’d love to see that,” comes Steve’s voice from by the bar. He’s holding the phone, wiggling the receiver when everyone turns to look at him. “Your choice.”

“You—” Mr Hargrove’s father starts, but is wisely interrupted by one of his friends standing up as well, and putting a hand on his elbow with a disgusted, “Leave it be, Neil. The little faggot’s not worth the trouble.”

There are several gasps from the other customers, but Mr Hargrove seems unfazed. Almost amused, actually. “At least my faggot ass can keep a family together. Ginny was, wait, let me think? Wive number five? How’s the divorce going, by the way?”

“Okay, that’s enough!”

If Sadie’d thought Mr Hargrove looked scary, it’s nothing compared to an angry Steven Harrington, apparently.

“You’ve got one minute to get your shit, and get the hell out. Everyone else,” and now he’s all charm again, looking around the restaurant at the shamelessly watching customers, “free pie, for having had to witness this little display of homophobic bullshittery.”

Mr Hargrove takes it upon himself to escort the men out of the restaurant, while Steve goes around apologising for what’s happened. Sadie shakes herself out of her stupor, and follows Steve in order to jot down everyone who’s interested in the free pie.

Before she can head back to the kitchen, though, Steve stops her and asks, quiet enough that only she catches it, “Hey. Are you okay?”

“That was,” Sadie breathes out, then trails off with a helpless shake of her head.

“Not a great first impression on our part?” Steve chuckles, wry smile on his lips. “Why don’t you take a break? Get a slice of pie, too? We got it handled out here.”

Sadie accepts the offer gratefully.

And the pie is delicious.

“Billy’s a fuckin’ master with anything even vaguely dessert related, man,” the line cook tells her, when she moans around her first forkfull. At her hum of surprise, he laughs, and adds, “Yeah, he still

does most of the bakin', even though he's the boss man nowadays. Ask him for his lava cake recipe, it's fuckin' sick."

The rest of the day is, thankfully, much less stressful.

Sadie gets to leave on time, and slips out the back door with a cheerful, "Goodbye!" thrown over her shoulder, only to stumble to a stop when she nearly bumps right into Mr Hargrove. And Steve. Because they're standing very close, with Steve's arm around Mr Hargrove's shoulders, and his chin resting on top of Mr Hargrove's head.

Mr Hargrove blinks one eye open at her, but doesn't move out of the hug. "You good? Sorry 'bout, you know. All that shit earlier."

"Oh, yeah, uh," Sadie stutters, feeling herself blush again, "don't worry, all good. Thanks."

"Have a nice night," Steve says, with another one of those sincere smiles. "See you tomorrow."

Sadie nods. "Tomorrow. Goodnight!"

She carefully steps around the kids, who are racing each other through the alley, shrieking with excitement. She's almost by the bike rack when there's a crash, followed by a warbling cry, and a distinctly toddlery voice going, "Shit!"

"Billy, I swear—"

"C'mon, Stevie, it's not my fault they—"

Sadie rides off, not bothering to hide her laughter.

(When she comes in the next day, Mr Hargrove is waiting for her. He apologises, again, and introduces himself properly.

"Billy, please," he insists, grimacing a little. "Mr Hargrove is my father, and, well. You saw that whole shitshow yesterday."

Then he shows her how to use the coffee machine without getting burned, before Steve calls for him from upstairs. He's almost through



the door when he turns back around, eyes flickering down to the collar of her shirt with a small but genuine smile.

Sadie watches him go, ghosting her fingers over the small rainbow pin Frannie had proudly stuck on her shirt earlier that morning.

She's pretty sure she's going to like this job after all.)

### **Author's Note:**

Steve and Billy's twins are called Matthew and Andrew. Robin's girlfriend carried them for them. Billy'd been scared, at first, when he'd realised they were both biologically his, that Steve would be sad or feel left out. Steve, though, hadn't stopped happy-crying for, like, a week because, "Now there's three of you for me to love, babe!"

There's also a rebloggable version of this [here](#) on tumblr.

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